

Lord Milner and the Coloured Franchise.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "CAPE TIMES."

Sir,—Though I cannot follow you in every particular, I am pleased to see that you did not allow the statement of the Hon. J. H. Hofmeyr, with regard to Lord Milner and the coloured franchise in the Transvaal and O.R.C. to pass unnoticed and unrefuted. As one who was well acquainted with Lord Milner's views on this question, and who during the years 1900, 1901, 1902, was in the thick of the struggle with regard to it, endeavouring to secure the adoption by the Imperial Government and its representatives in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, of something like the Cape native policy, and who, therefore, can claim to have some personal knowledge of the ins and outs of the question, may I add something to what you have written?

Mr. Hofmeyr is right in fixing the ultimate responsibility for Article 8 of the Vereeniging Terms of Surrender on England, who was the conqueror, and whose Government could have taken up the same position in May, 1902, that it did in March, 1901, at the Middelburg Conference, and thus have kept the power in its own hands of giving the franchise to the coloured man and the civilised native, when a representative constitution was granted; but he is wrong and unfair when he puts the blame for this not having been done on the shoulders of Lord Milner, who was always in favour of civilisation, and not colour, being the determining factor in eligibility for civil and political privileges. If Mr. Hofmeyr had blamed Lord Kitchener, he would have been nearer the mark, for this was one of the points of disagreement between the two men. The real reasons for the change of policy on the part of the British Government in 1902, as compared with that of 1901, may, I believe, be summarised as follows:

1. The death of Queen Victoria, who would never have consented, had she lived, to sacrifice the rights of her loyal coloured subjects in order to bring about a cessation of hostilities.

2. The accession of his present Majesty, whose views on the question were not the same as his mother's; and who, apart from that fact, had set his heart on peace being made on any possible terms before his Coronation.

3. The unceasing propaganda carried on after the Middelburg Conference by emissaries of both the Boer and the Uitlander to influence the people of England from the highest to the lowest against granting civil and political rights to the coloured people in the Transvaal and O.R.C.

4. The equally unceasing efforts of what were called the pro-Boers and the pro-Boer press in Great Britain to force the Government to bring the war to an end by granting the demands of the Boers, of which the withholding of political rights from all coloured people was a principal one.

5. Mr. Chamberlain's personal predilection in favour of confining the franchise to white people, which had been over-ridden in 1901 by the decision of Lord Salisbury and the Cabinet as a whole, but which prevailed in 1902, owing to the causes already mentioned.

6. The fact that Lord Kitchener was in accord with this idea, and was virtually entrusted with the chief say in the negotiations which took place, Milner, who was, after all, only a servant of the Government, having perforce to carry out its behests, even if against his own better judgment.

7. The opportunism of Lord Milner's legal adviser, Sir Richard Solomon, who might have been expected to have advocated the upholding of justice to all British subjects irrespective of the colour of their skin, but did not do so.

As bearing out my contention, I quote as follows from the "Times History of the War," Vol. V., pages 91 and 92, in reference to a peace settlement:

"With whom was the main responsibility for its attainment to rest? By analogy with most wars it should rest with the civil power, represented in South Africa by Milner. But once again the situation was unique. No general in the past had been placed in Kitchener's position. He was fighting a nation in arms, so that the military surrender and the political surrender must in the nature of things be closely

intertwined. His army, moreover, was in a very peculiar sense arbiter of the settlement. Unidentified with the fierce political antagonism of the past, it represented the first intimate contact between the Empire at large and the Boer race. Its Commander-in-chief therefore was marked out to play a leading, perhaps the leading, part in the final pacification. Whether from the highest political standpoint this position was a desirable one, the reader must be left to judge. At this point we are only concerned to indicate the conditions which gave rise to it, and to prepare the reader for a difference of opinion between Kitchener and Milner, which at a later stage assumed a somewhat important aspect. Broadly speaking, the difference was this: that Milner from the political point of view favoured unconditional surrender; Kitchener primarily from the military but incidentally from the political point of view was content to obtain a surrender on terms."

Even so, and one of the terms was embodied in Article 8. The Unionist Government was responsible for this, but the present Liberal (?) Government has outthorowed Herod by interpreting Article 8 in accordance with the strongest Transvaal anti-native prejudices, and has intensified the injustice by the granting of a Constitution based on manhood suffrage and the possession of a white skin. This Lord Milner and the Unionists never would have done.

I am glad to learn that Mr. Hofmeyr regrets that England has failed in her duty to her coloured native subjects in this matter, but I hope he will no longer blame Lord Milner for it.

England having thus failed, it becomes the duty of the white people of South Africa, leaving the dead past to bury itself, to unite irrespective of race or party to rectify England's mistake, and themselves to vindicate the principles of even-handed justice and fair play, and to bring it about that in no part of British South Africa shall the right to civil and political privileges be dependent on the colour of a man's skin.

While regretting England's failure, we must not forget that if ever the desired consummation just mentioned be reached by United South Africa, it will, after all, be because England, in the first instance, the England of the past, believed in the principles of absolute justice and fair play to all her subjects, and gave a Constitution to the Cape Colony in which no distinction of colour was made. She educated the people in the practice of this principle, and perhaps it may yet be given to her daughters in South Africa to re-teach the Mother Country the lessons first learned from her in this matter, even as the South African football team did in the matter of the Rugby game. There is, further, this drop of comfort in the present situation, that when the other South African colonies shall have adopted a native policy founded on that of the Cape Colony, a result which I feel convinced must take place sooner or later, our coloured and native fellow-citizens will know that they owe the charter of their privileges to the free action of their white fellow South Africans. This will create a bond of union between the Europeans and the coloured and native populations, which will enable each to fulfil its destiny on parallel lines with the rest, each separate to some extent, but each forming a recognised and integral part of the South African political nationality of the future. (So may it be.

In order to help to bring about this result, the coloured native voter at the present juncture has one paramount duty to himself and his race, and that is, not to look to England for the maintaining of his rights, but to support and vote for only such candidates, irrespective of party, or for such political parties as have pledged themselves or do pledge themselves to unreserved support of the principle of equal civil and political rights for all civilised British subjects without distinction of colour, and that not only in the Cape Colony, but in the platform for a Federated South Africa.—I am, etc.,

THEO. L. SCHREINER.

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